



Polish Heritage Society (UK)



Lieutenant-General Stanisław Kopański

1895 – 1976

Hero of Tobruk

Andrzej Suchcitz



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Lieutenant-General Stanisław Kopański

in Detroit c. 1965

photo: Leon Chocianowicz

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Stanisław Kopański at the beginning of his military career, c.1919

Introduction

Despite nearly half a century having passed since his death, no academic biography has yet appeared of a man who was both one of Poland's leading commanders of the Second World War and a key stalwart of the post-war Polish exiled community in Great Britain.

General Stanisław Kopański was highly regarded both as a field and staff officer. Born a Russian subject, at a time when Poland was partitioned between her rapacious neighbours, he fought in the Tsarist Russian Army. When in 1918 Poland was restored to the map of Europe he chose a military career, fighting with distinction in the Polish – Ukrainian (1918-1919) and then the Polish-Bolshevik (1919-1920) wars. Following the armistice in October 1920 he continued in his chosen profession, rising to become by 1939 a full colonel and Chief of the III (Operations) Bureau of the General Staff. Following the defeat of Poland he quickly managed to reach France where he was given a new appointment in the Polish Forces being organised there. In spring 1940 he was chosen to organise and command a new Polish brigade in Syria. At the head of this brigade, now named the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade he distinguished himself in the 1941 Defence of Tobruk and subsequently in the Libyan Campaign at Gazala and Bardia. Chosen to organise and command the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division he was not, much to his deep disappointment, to lead it into battle in the Italian Campaign.

In July 1943 he was appointed Chief of the General Staff at a most difficult time for the Polish cause. With the betrayal of Poland by the allies in Tehran and Yalta, the fate of Poland was sealed for half a century. Political exile awaited most of Poland's soldiers who had fought loyally alongside their western allies throughout the war. General Kopański was chosen to be the Inspector General of the Polish Resettlement Corps, the formation through which the Polish Armed Forces were to be demobilised, and their soldiers inducted into civilian life in a foreign country. General Kopański remained in exile playing a very active role in Polish political, military and social life, all with the aim of restoring freedom to his homeland.

General Kopański was above all a professional soldier. While like all soldiers he had his own personal sympathies and no doubt antipathies amid the complex politics which formed part of the make-up of Polish military history in the first half of the twentieth century, he never allowed those feelings to interfere in his military decisions, especially where effective personnel appointments were concerned.

He provides a good example of this in his war memoirs. In 1942, as the commander of the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division which was in the process of being organized and undergoing initial training, he was showing Professor Stanisław Kot¹ erstwhile ambassador to the USSR, how the Division was progressing. Prof. Kot was a die-hard supporter of Prime Minister General Sikorski and an emphatic critic and opponent of Marshal Piłsudski and the pre-war system, especially of anyone linked to Piłsudski's I Brigade of Legions and the pre-war Military Intelligence Service. General Kopański took Prof. Kot to inspect the 3rd Carpathian Heavy Machine Gun Battalion which was one of the first units to have organized itself. Its commanding officer, Lt-Col. Tadeusz Skinder², had served in Piłsudski's I Brigade of Legions, had been for many years a senior officer in the Polish Military Intelligence Service, and was a devoted supporter of Marshal Piłsudski. Professor Kot made known his surprise that Colonel Skinder could hold such a responsible position bearing in mind his political sympathies. He repeated this on seeing another senior commander of the same political persuasion. General Kopański responded that he was not interested in the political sympathies of his officers but made his appointments on the merits of individual officers. He regarded Lt-Col. Skinder as one of the best unit

¹ Prof. Stanisław Kot (1885-1975) Polish historian and politician. During the First World War he was head of the Press Office of the (Polish) Supreme National Committee in Austria-Hungary. 1920-1934: professor of the history of art at the Jagiellonian University of Kraków. From 1934 active in the political opposition to Marshal Piłsudski and his successors, joining the Polish Peasant (Agrarian) Party. Vehement supporter of General Sikorski. 1940-1941: Minister of Internal Affairs. 1941-1942: Ambassador to the USSR. 1943-1944: Minister of Information and Documentation. 1945-1947: ambassador of the Polish communist Government in Rome. Escaped to the west. 1955-1963: Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Polish Peasant (Agrarian) Party in Exile.

² Colonel Tadeusz Skinder (1897-1952) Polish soldier. During the First World War fought in J. Piłsudski's Ist Brigade of Legions and the Polish Military Organisation. Company and battalion commander in independent Poland's Army. 1932-1937: Chief of Intelligence Frontier Defence Corps. 1937-1938: commander III battalion 57th Infantry Regiment. 1938-1939: Chief of the Foreign Intelligence Department of the Intelligence Department of the II (Intelligence) Bureau General Staff. 1939-1940: Chief of the Polish Intelligence Station in Romania. 1942-1943: commander 3rd Carpathian Heavy Machine Gun Battalion. 1943: deputy commander 2nd Carpathian Rifle Brigade. 1943-1945: Deputy Chief of the Intelligence Bureau, General Staff. 1947-1948: commander 45th Brigade Group Polish Resettlement Corps in Blackshaw Moor. 1949-1950: co initiator and first manager of the Penrhos Polish Camp for elderly Poles in north west Wales.

commanders in his division – and in supporting him showed his true measure as a senior commander.

Col. Skinder was my grandfather, and may this booklet about General Stanisław Kopański be my tribute to an exceptional commander, often overlooked both as a soldier and as a person. More importantly may it provoke today's historians to undertake the research and writing of a full scale academic biography of the "Gentleman General". It is high time such a biography was written.

I would like to thank the Polish Heritage Society in the UK and its Chairman Dr. Marek Stella-Sawicki for agreeing to design, produce and publish this booklet and also Hugo Kondratiuk for taking the time and effort to proofread the text which has only improved it. Thanks are also due to Marek Mrozek for the map showing the route and operations of the Carpathian Brigade.

London, 3rd May 2025

Dr Andrzej Suchcitz



General Stanisław Kopański (right) with General Marian Kukiel (left) and General Kazimierz Sosnkowski (centre), in London UK 1944.



The official portrait of General Stanisław Kopański by
Halina Karska (*courtesy Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum*)

Lieutenant-General Stanisław KOPAŃSKI

1895 – 1976

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EARLY YEARS AND SERVICE IN THE RUSSIAN TSARIST ARMY 1895-1917

General Stanisław Kopański had an extraordinarily full life both as a full-time professional soldier and then as one of the leading figures of the post-war Polish world of political exiles in Great Britain. He is best remembered and famous for being the defender of Tobruk during its first siege in 1941, when he led the Carpathian Brigade. However, this has often overshadowed his other achievements, it was but one among many. It can be said that he lived life to the full, never shirking the responsibilities laid upon his shoulders.

The Kopański family originally came from Mazovia, south of Warsaw. In the seventeenth century they moved to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, then a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where for the next few centuries they owned a landed estate.

As a result of the three partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century (1772, 1793 and 1795) the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland forming the Polish Commonwealth were seized, annexed and occupied by Tsarist Russia, Prussia and Austria. The nineteenth century was characterised by a constant struggle in one form or another to regain Poland's independence. The Kopański family had suddenly become subjects of the Russian Tsar.

The General's paternal grandfather had been a participant of the November 1830/1831 Uprising against the Russians, during which he had been wounded. Stanisław's father, Wincenty Kopański was initially a military lawyer in the Tsarist Army, reaching the equivalent of the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Having resigned from the army he became a civil lawyer, settling in St. Petersburg. His maternal grandfather, a medical doctor, took part in the 1863 January Uprising and was arrested and for a time imprisoned by the Russian authorities. His daughter Anna Klukowska married Wincenty and Stanisław, the third of four children, was born on 19th May 1895 in St. Petersburg. He went to one of the Russian state schools. In a time of social and political ferment, the young Kopański as many of his fellow Poles was active in secret Polish patriotic educational societies; where Polish history and literature - subjects which were forbidden by the Russian authorities – were read and taught.

Kopański completed his secondary education in 1913 gaining his matriculation and being awarded the gold medal as the best pupil. He subsequently studied at the Road and Communications Technical Institute. The outbreak of the First World War led to the interruption of his studies in 1916, when to avoid being called up to one of the infantry officer cadet schools where after a few months one was sent to the front, he signed up to and entered the Mikhailovsky Artillery Officer Cadet School in Petrograd. Having completed a seven-month course he left ranked second out of 250 cadets, joined the horse artillery and was posted to the 2nd Cavalry Division on the eastern front.

SERVICE IN THE ARMY OF INDEPENDENT POLAND 1917-1939

Following the February 1917 revolution which brought Aleksandr Kerensky to power, the long-held hope of forming Polish units in Russia began to become a reality. The young Kopański joined the Polish I Corps in late 1917, joining first the 3rd Lancers Regiment and then the 2nd Horse Artillery Troop, taking part in fighting against the Bolsheviks in 1918. Following the disarmament of the I Corps by the Germans in May 1918 many of its soldiers, including Kopański, were transported to the tiny Kingdom of Poland that had been created by the Central Powers in 1916. Here he greeted the end of the war and the re-emergence of an independent Poland. However, this was a freedom which had to be fought for to secure a lasting peace.

At the end of 1918 Lt. Kopański found himself commanding the 2nd platoon of the 1st Horse Artillery Troop in the battles against the Ukrainians for Lwów and the surrounding territories. In spring 1919 his platoon was transferred to the north-eastern front, this time against the Russian Bolsheviks who were pushing westwards and had invaded Poland in early January in the Wilno-Lida area. Lt. Kopański's horse artillery platoon as a part of the 1st Cavalry Brigade took part in the operation to liberate Wilno in April 1919. It was during this operation that he was badly wounded, leading to the loss of his left eye. He spent the next year in Warsaw recovering.

From summer 1919 he was appointed commandant of the Horse Artillery NCO School in the capital, and in September was given the task of organising and training the 3rd Troop of the 1st Horse Artillery Battery. Early in

May 1920, having had enough of being in the rear lines, he asked for and received a transfer to his old unit the aforementioned 1st Horse Artillery Battery in which he served until the end of the Polish-Bolshevik War in October 1920. In late August he participated in the Battle of the Zamość Ring which saw the defeat of Budyenny's famed Konarmiya, after which Lt. Kopański participated in its pursuit and further defeats.³

With the end of the war he settled into a period of nearly twenty years of peace-time soldiering, climbing in the commissioned ranks. He was verified in the rank of Captain with seniority as of 1919. In 1921 he took two years out to complete his engineering studies, gaining his diploma as a certified engineer at the Warsaw Polytechnic before returning to full time soldiering in spring 1923. Promoted Major in 1924, he was also appointed Director of Studies at the Artillery Officer Cadet School, a post he held for three years.

It was during his stint at the Cadet School that the May 1926 coup took place with Marshal Józef Piłsudski, Chief of State and Commander-in-Chief in 1918-1922, taking power.⁴ Major Kopański, though not having to play an active role in the fighting in Warsaw, strongly supported the incumbent President and Government against the rebels. This did not diminish his very high esteem of and devotion to Marshal Piłsudski, but he was keenly aware of the divisions among the professional officer corps which were a consequence of the coup.

From 1927 to 1929 Kopański was seconded to study at the École Supérieure de Guerre in Paris, France. He then returned to Poland where he was

³ Marshal Semyon Budyenny (1883-1973). Tsarist NCO and Soviet military commander. Joined the Bolshevik Red Army. Made his reputation fighting the White Russians. In 1920 he commanded the Konarmiya in the invasion of Poland. Defeated at Zamość in late August 1920. He subsequently went on to become Inspector of Cavalry of the Red Army (1924-1937) and then until 1940 commander of the Moscow Military District. In 1941 he commanded the Southern Front against the German invasion with disastrous consequences. Relieved of his post, in 1943 he was appointed Inspector of Cavalry of the Red Army. One of the very few favourites of Stalin, he survived all the purges and failures as a front-line commander during the early stages of the German attack on Russia in 1941.

⁴ Marshal Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935). Polish statesman and military commander. Before the First World War active in clandestine and military actions against the Russian occupiers. During the First World War he was the organiser and commander of the Polish Legions, which fought alongside the Austro-Hungarian Empire against Russia. Commanded the 1st Brigade of Legions. In 1917 imprisoned in Magdeburg by the Central Powers for refusing to take the oath of allegiance to them. 1918-1922: Chief of State of independent Poland and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army. Architect of the Polish victory during the Polish - Ukrainian War of 1918-1919 and during the Polish Bolshevik War of 1919-1920. 1921-1923: Chairman of the Inner War Council. Led the May 1926 coup d'état and to his death was Inspector General of the Armed Forces and Minister of Military Affairs. He was also briefly Prime Minister, being Poland's dictator behind the scenes.

appointed commander of the 1st battery of the 6th Medium Artillery Regiment in Lwów, being promoted Lieutenant-Colonel in 1932. That same year he had his first stint as a staff officer with an appointment to the III (Operations) Bureau of the Polish General Staff. He found himself in a two-man Ordnance Section whose task was to evaluate designs for all armaments for the Army. From 1935 to 1937 he was Deputy Chief of the Armoured Forces Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs. This was a prelude to his appointment in the spring of 1937 as commanding officer of the 1st Motorised Artillery Regiment in Stryj in south-eastern Poland, the first such unit in the Polish Army. Until that time all the artillery regiments had been horse drawn based. In the light of his previous appointment and now this new one, it was clear that Lt-Col. Kopański was earmarked for higher things within the Polish Army's modernisation programme.

During the Czech crisis in the autumn of 1938, Kopański's regiment took part in the recovery of Silesian-Teschen, taken by force from the Poles by the Czechs in 1919, and now ceded by Czechoslovakia to Poland.

Immediately afterwards he was called to undertake a course for chiefs of staff and quartermasters at army level being held at the Warsaw Staff Academy. Before completing it, he was ordered to report to the office of the Chief of General Staff, General Wacław Stachiewicz, where he found out to his surprise that he had been appointed Chief of the General Staff's III (Operations) Bureau.⁵ At the same time he was also promoted full Colonel. This was March 1939 with the storm clouds over Poland clearly gathering, and the next six months were ones of intensive staff planning and preparation for war.

During Kopański's whole career so far, his annual assessments had been full of praise and recognition of his abilities as a tactician, his skills as an issuer of precise and clear orders, and his abilities as a good organiser with a

⁵ Lieutenant-General Wacław Stachiewicz (1894-1973). Polish soldier. During the First World War had fought in Piłsudski's Polish Legions (1st Brigade). 1919-1920: held various staff appointments during the Polish-Bolshevik War. 1921-1923: studied at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre in France. On his return to Poland, he was a lecturer at the Staff Academy in Warsaw and Chief of the I (Organisational) Bureau of the General Staff. 1927-1933: Deputy commander of the 1st Legionary Infantry Division in Wilno. 1933-1935: Officer commanding 7th Infantry Division in Częstochowa. 1935-1939: Chief of the General Staff. Following the Polish 1939 Campaign, interned in Romania from where he escaped to north Africa and in 1943 reached London. Held no further appointments. From 1948 resident in Canada. Author of voluminous accounts of his time as Chief of General Staff.

natural talent for clearly synthesising whatever topic he was requested to write on. All these attributes were soon to be put to the ultimate test.

THE POLISH CAMPAIGN AND FIRST STEPS IN THE POLISH ARMY ABROAD 1939-1940

On 1st September 1939 the Germans invaded Poland from the west, north and south. Seventeen days later with the Polish armies desperately fighting to hold onto successive lines of defence, the Soviet Union stabbed Poland in the back invading from the east. During the short lived but intensive Polish 1939 Campaign, the Polish Supreme GHQ and thus Col. Kopański were constantly on the move, which made directing and co-ordinating operations extremely difficult if not impossible. GHQ left Warsaw on 6th September transferring to Brześć on the Bug, from where it transferred to Włodzimierz Wołyński, then Młynów and eventually Kołomyja near the Polish - Romanian border.

On the morning of 17th September 1939 the Soviet Union, fulfilling its obligations under the German-Soviet (Molotov-Rippentrop) Pact of 23rd August 1939, invaded Poland from the east, giving the fatal stab in the back and making any Polish plans for defending the Romanian bridgehead obsolete. On 18th September the Polish President, Government and High Command crossed into allied Romania (Poland and Romania had an alliance activated in the event of a Russian attack on either country). However, under political pressure from Germany, instead of being allowed to pass through to France, the Government and High Command were interned in various camps. Col. Kopański ended up in Calimanesti from where he managed to escape in late October and with false papers (under the name of Antoni Puciata) supplied by the Polish Consulate General in Bucharest departed via Zagreb and northern Italy to France. There he rejoined the Polish Army which was in the process of being formed under the new Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski, who had also been appointed Prime Minister.⁶ In December 1939 Kopański was appointed Chief

⁶ General Władysław Sikorski (1881-1943). Polish statesman and soldier During the First World War served in the Polish Legions, briefly commanding the 3rd Infantry Regiment of the II Brigade of Legions. From 1918 served in the Polish Army. 1919-1920 commander of the 9th Infantry Division and the Polesie Group. August 1920; GOC 5th Army during the Battle of Warsaw, subsequently GOC 3rd Army at the Battle of the Zamość

of Armoured Forces at the Polish GHQ. In March 1940 he was seconded for two months to the IX Corps of the French 4th Army on the Maginot Line. He was recalled before time in early April and offered the task of forming and training a Polish brigade in Syria, under the overall command of General Maxime Weygand, the French C-in-C Levant.⁷ The brigade was primarily made up of men who had escaped from Poland after the 1939 Campaign and had made their way via the Balkans to French controlled Syria.

COMMANDER OF THE CARPATHIAN BRIGADE, TOBRUK AND LIBYA 1940-1942

The new 6th Rifle Brigade as it was initially designated was formed along French lines in the Homs area earmarked as its organisational base. Whilst it was in the process of organisation, France was invaded by Germany and quickly overrun, suing for a surrender. This became Col. Kopański's moment of truth. There was no way he was prepared to surrender and lay down his arms accepting France's orders to adhere to the surrender terms. There thus ensued a week of negotiations with the French to clarify the brigade's position. An Initial positive attitude to the brigade's crossing over to British controlled Palestine turned to French demands for the brigade to remain in French controlled Syria and to be disarmed in accordance with the armistice terms. These demands were rejected by Col. Kopański, who had orders from his C-in-C General Sikorski that all Polish forces were to seek to join British

Ring defeating Budyenny's Konnarmiya. 1921-1922: Chief of the General Staff. 1922-1923: Prime Minister. 1923-1924: Inspector General of Infantry. 1924-1925: Minister of War. 1926-1926: GOC VIth Military District in Lwów. 1928-1939: on half pay, author of several books and increasingly involved with opposition politics. 1939-1943: Prime Minister of Poland and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in Exile. Killed in an air crash off Gibraltar.

⁷ General Maxime Weygand (1867-1965) French soldier. Graduate of St. Cyr in 1887. Served in the cavalry. Instructor at the Cavalry School in Saumur. 1914-1916: Chief of Staff 9th Army. 1916: Chief of Staff Army Group North and in 1918 was Chief of Staff of Marshal Ferdinand Foch as Supreme Allied Commander-in-Chief. 1920: member of the Inter-Allied Mission to Poland. 1922-1924: High Commissioner of the Levant. 1925-1930: Director of the Centre for Higher Military Studies. 1930-1931: Chief of General Staff. 1931-1935: Inspector General of the Army and Vice-President of the War Council. 1939-1940: C-in-C Levant. May-June 1940: Commander-in-Chief of the French Army during the second half of the 1940 French Campaign. Surrendered to the Germans. 1940-1942 as a member of the Vichy regime was Delegate-General in North Africa. Opposed extensive co-operation with the Germans. 1942-1945: imprisoned by the Germans. Recipient of the Polish Order of Virtuti Militari II class (for 1920).

Forces.⁸ Col. Kopański's definite stance led to a partial climb down by General Mittelhauser, the commander of the French Forces in the Levant.

Kopański had to be careful not to overstretch his position, bearing in mind that the Brigade was still in Syria and that the armistice terms had come into force. In the last days of June 1940, the redesignated Carpathian Rifle Brigade (from January 1941 the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade) was transported to British mandated Palestine. Col. Kopański had through a combination of firmness and diplomacy saved his brigade from forced disbandment to fight another day alongside allied forces. This was no mean achievement. The brigade was sent to Latrun for further re-organisation and training. In the autumn of 1940, the brigade received British arms and equipment. Meanwhile in September 1940, as another sign of the regard in which he was held by his superiors, Kopański was promoted Major-General just fifteen months after he had been promoted colonel. He was forty-five years old.

In October 1940 the brigade was moved to Egypt, west of Alexandria, to build up the defensive positions at Dikheila. Soon after, units of the brigade were seconded to act as guards at POW camps housing captured Italian prisoners. Faced with Axis campaigns in Greece and Yugoslavia the intention had been to send the Carpathian Brigade as part of the Allied Expeditionary Force to Greece. However, the fall of Greece and the increased danger posed by the newly arrived German Afrika Korps led to the withholding of the brigade and its redeployment to the Alexandria area to renew work on the Dikheila defences, and from May 1941 the defences at Mersa Matruh.

In August 1941 with the agreement of the Polish C-in-C General Władysław Sikorski, the Carpathian Brigade was transported by sea in seven transports over ten days to the fortress of Tobruk, some 150 kilometres west of the Libyan-Egyptian border. Since mid-April 1941 Tobruk had been invested by the Germans and Italians and had been defended by General Leslie

⁸ General Eugene Mittelhauser (1873-1949) French soldier. Graduate of the St. Cyr Military Academy in 1894. He served in Algeria and Morocco. 1915: commander of the 60th Infantry Regiment and from 1917 to 1918 commander of the 1st Moroccan Infantry Brigade. 1918: GOC 36th Infantry Division. 1919-1921: Chief of Staff of the French Military Mission to Czechoslovakia. 1921-1925: Chief of Staff of the Czechoslovak Army. After his return to France, commanded the 29th Infantry Division. 1928-1930: GOC 18th Military District and then to 1931 the 20th Military District. 1931-1938: member of the Supreme War Council. June-July 1940 GOC French Forces in Syria and Lebanon. Supported the Vichy regime, retired in summer 1940.

Morshead's 9th Australian Infantry Division.⁹ General Kopański's brigade took over the defence of the western and southern sectors, and from October the whole brigade took over the difficult and crucial western sector where the Germans had earlier captured the Medauuar hill creating a salient. Operations essentially followed the Australian scheme of a defence in depth, with mutually supporting defensive positions and aggressive patrolling to maintain the enemy in constant alarm and dominate no man's land, as well as by covering minefields and obstacles by fire.¹⁰ Fighting continued throughout the period, intensifying in November in connection with Operation "Crusader". Attempts initiated by the Polish brigade to link up with the attacking British forces failed despite heavy fighting, and Tobruk was once more cut off. On 14th November General Sikorski arrived on a surprise visit to inspect the besieged port and the Polish forces defending Tobruk. During this visit he personally decorated General Kopański with the Cross of Valour.

In early December 1941 continued pressure by the British 8th Army under the command of Lt-Gen. Neil Ritchie¹¹ forced the Germans to withdraw; while at the same time Kopański recaptured the Medauuar salient, and White Knoll Hill and captured Acroma, ten kilometres to the west of the Tobruk front line. The siege of Tobruk had been raised. The significance of this defence was that it had prevented the Axis enemy from continuing its offensive into Egypt, the key to the Near East. The Brigade continued to advance westwards and between 15th and 17th December broke through the Italian positions at El Gazala continuing the pursuit. During this episode the Poles took 1689 prisoners and captured 59 artillery pieces, 78 heavy machine guns, 38 mortars and 11 tanks. The significance of the breakthrough at Gazala was

⁹ Lieutenant-General Leslie Morshead (1889-1959) Australian soldier. During the First World War he commanded a platoon of the 2nd Rifles Battalion at Anzac Bay, Gallipoli. 1916-1918: Officer Commanding 33rd Infantry Battalion on the western front. 1920-1937: returned to civilian life. 1937-1939 commander 5th Infantry Brigade. 1939-1941: commander 18th Infantry Brigade. 1941-1943: GOC 9th Australian Division at the first Defence of Tobruk (overall commander) May-December 1941, then at the Battle of El Alamein. 1943: GOC II Australian Corps and New Guinea Force. 1943-1944: GOC 2nd Australian Army and from 1944 GOC I Corps in Borneo. Recipient of the Polish Order of Virtuti Militari V class.

¹⁰ Paul Latawski, *The Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade at Tobruk August 1941-December 1941*, Presentation at Polish Heritage Society in UK conference, October 2023, p.20

¹¹ Lieutenant-General Sir Neil Ritchie (1897-1983) British soldier. Fought on the Western Front, in the Middle East and Mesopotamia during the First World War latterly as a battalion adjutant. 1938: OC 2nd Battalion Kings Own in Palestine. 1940: BGS II Corps of the BEF in France. 1940-1941: GOC 51st Highland Division. 1942-1943: GOC 52nd Infantry Division. 1943-1945: GOC XII Corps in the NW European Campaign. 1945-1947: GOC Scottish Command and Governor of Edinburgh Castle. 1945-1949: GOC Far East Land Forces.

that it allowed the 8th Army to pursue the enemy and throw him out of Cyrenaica, though as the future would show this was but temporary.

Whilst the 8th Army pursued the enemy it was decided to capture Bardia, a fortress town similar to Tobruk although smaller on the coast near the border with Egypt, which was being held by an Italian garrison. Its capture would open the whole of the coastal road for the allies. The task was given to the 1st New Zealand Division supported by the artillery of the Carpathian Brigade. Following a three-day assault Bardia surrendered on 2nd January 1942.

Following a renewed Axis counter-offensive under General Erwin Rommel¹² in the second half of January 1942, the Carpathian Brigade received the task of organising and defending the fort of el Mechili through which British forces were retreating eastwards. After it had carried out the initial task the main defence was handed over to the Free French Brigade. Finally in March 1942 General Kopański's Poles were withdrawn from the front line and transferred to Egypt and then Palestine for a well-earned rest.

For his part in the defence of Tobruk, General Kopański received the Gold Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari (IV class) and the British Distinguished Service Order. As *The Manchester Guardian* special correspondent in Cairo wrote at the time, [...] *Kopański is one of the most popular commanders in Libya with both his officers and his men. [...] Kopański is a quiet, mild-mannered man, without any of the fire-breathing qualities you may expect in a commander of the most feared of the Allied troops in Libya, for the Poles are certainly that judging by the Germans' reaction. Yet his men would follow him anywhere.*¹² General Kopański had good relations with both his superiors, firstly with General Morshead, then with Gen. Sir Ronald Scobie who took over command on 22nd October with his 70th Division.¹³ Initially there were differences of opinion with Scobie but these were quickly ironed out and Kopański held a deep respect for both commanders.

Apart from being a much-needed period of rest for the Brigade, this was a time of important organisational changes in the structure of the Polish Army

¹² *The Manchester Guardian*, Men of eleven nations fighting Axis in Libya. Polish Troops the Terror of the Nazis, 10th March 1942.

¹³ Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald Scobie (1893-1969) British soldier. Took part in the First World War on the Western Front, becoming a brigade major in 1918. 1938: assistant Adjutant General at the War Office. 1941-1942: GOC 70th Infantry Division and commander of the defence of Tobruk from 22nd October 1941. 1942-1943: GOC Malta. 1943-1945: GOC III Corps in Greece. Recipient of the Polish Order of Virtuti Militari V class.

in the Middle East. In March 1942 the first evacuation of Polish Forces from the USSR took place. There followed a second evacuation in summer 1942. On 30th July 1941 the Polish-Soviet Agreement had been signed restoring diplomatic relations between the two countries, nullifying the German-Soviet agreements of August and September 1939. The USSR had joined the Allies, though with their own programme for the future of Europe. As a result of this agreement a Polish Army under General Władysław Anders was created from amongst former POWs captured by the Soviets in 1939 and those Polish citizens who had been deported by the NKVD to Siberia in 1940 and 1941.¹⁴ With the arrival in Iran of a force of some 70,000 troops the Polish Army could be re-organised and reinforced in various areas. Thus, on 3rd May 1942 General Kopański's Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade was expanded to form the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division (two brigades, divisional artillery, engineers, heavy machine gun and signals battalions, services and a recce regiment) with Kopański as its first General Officer Commanding.

The period from May 1942 to early summer of 1943 was one of intensive reorganisation and training in preparation for operations in southern Europe. General Kopański was eagerly awaiting the time when his 3rd Division would go into battle as part of a larger Polish formation. At that time, of all the Polish land army senior commanders, he held the most recent combat experience. It must be remembered that from the fall of France in June 1940 until February 1944 the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade was the only Polish land army formation which saw active combat. During this time all the combat fighting was being carried out by the Polish Navy and the Polish Air Force, and in the occupied home country by the underground resistance Home Army.

¹⁴ General Władysław Anders (1892-1970) Polish soldier. During the First World War he served in the Tsarist Russian Army. 1917-1918: served in the Polish I Corps in Russia, and from 1918 in the Polish Army taking part in the Wielkopolska Rising of 1919. 1926-1937: GOC 2nd Independent Cavalry Brigade. 1937-1939: GOC Nowogródzka Cavalry Brigade and Cavalry Operational Group in the Polish 1939 Campaign. 1939-1941: prisoner in the USSR. 1941-1942: GOC Polish Forces in the USSR. 1942-1943: GOC Polish Army in the East. 1943-February 1945 and June 1945-November 1946 GOC Polish 2nd Corps in the Italian Campaign. February-May 1945: acting C-in-C Polish Armed Forces. 1946-1954: Inspector General of the Armed Forces in Exile. 1954-1970: member of the Council of Three and C-in-C in Exile.

CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF 1943-1946

However, it was not to be. In May 1943 the Polish C-in-C General Sikorski arrived in the Middle East on an inspection tour accompanied by General Tadeusz Klimecki, the Chief of General Staff who had in 1939 been Kopański's subordinate.¹⁵ On 2nd July 1943 Gen. Sikorski sent a message to Gen. Kopański informing him of his decision to appoint Klimecki as GOC 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division and Kopański as Chief of General Staff, though deferring the decision until Kopański agreed to accept the appointment. Whilst honoured to be offered the second top post in the Polish Army he requested that he remain as divisional commander, once again proving his motivation. The Polish C-in-C was never to receive this reply written on 5th July. The previous day, whilst taking off from Gibraltar bound for the UK, General Sikorski's aircraft crashed into the sea killing him and all on board, including General Klimecki. Only the pilot survived.

The new Polish C-in-C, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, maintained his predecessor's decision and reasoning.¹⁶ In the event General Kopański accepted the proposal and in August 1943 took up his new position in London. The Polish General Staff based in the Rubens Hotel near Victoria Station, was the command hub of the Polish Armed Forces in exile. General Kopański took control of all the major departments of the armed forces: the Organisational, Intelligence, Operations and Training, Quartermaster, Personnel and Special Bureaux of the General Staff. All the threads of the various military operations and activities of the Polish Armed Forces operating in the Middle East, Italy, Scotland and North-West Europe ran back to the General Staff and through its Chief to the C-in-C.

¹⁵ Major-General Tadeusz Klimecki (1895-1943) Polish soldier, During the First World War served in the Polish Legions and the Austrian Army. 1927-1930: Chief of Staff 12th Infantry Division. 1930-1934: lecturer and dean (tactics) at the Warsaw Staff Academy. 1939: Department Chief in the III (Operations) Bureau of the General Staff and Supreme GHQ during the Polish 1939 Campaign. 1939-1940 Chief of the III (Operations and Training) Bureau General Staff in France. 1940-1943: Chief of General Staff. Killed alongside General Sikorski in a plane crash off Gibraltar.

¹⁶ General Kazimierz Sosnkowski (1885-1969) Polish soldier. During the First World War Chief of Staff to Piłsudski's 1st Brigade of Legions. 1917-1918 prisoner of the Germans in Magdeburg with J. Piłsudski. From 1918 in the Polish Army. 1919-1920: Vice-Minister of War. May-June 1920: GOC Reserve Army. 1920-1921: Minister of War. 1925-1926: GOC VIIth (Poznań) Military District. 1927-1939: Army Inspector. During the Polish 1939 Campaign GOC Southern Front. From November 1939 in France as Commandant-in-Chief of the Polish Resistance Army (Union of Armed Struggle). 1943-1944: Supreme C-in-C. From 1944 lived in Canada.

Bearing in mind the increasingly difficult political situation for Poland as an ally, the role and responsibilities of the position of CGS visibly expanded. Inevitably, General Kopański was drawn into the political life of Poland's international position. For the first time he was no longer just a front line or staff officer but now had also to deal with the political issues affecting the armed forces. An important part of his duties was the formulation in conjunction with the C-in-C of the role of the Home Army in occupied Poland and its stance in the face of repeated Soviet attacks on the Home Army. The Polish Government had virtually given the underground state and military authorities a free hand in deciding when and where any general or specific uprising should take place. There remains a point of controversy that Kopański as CGS redacted a part of the C-in-C's message to GHQ Home Army in Warsaw which cautioned against precipitate action. This became the source of much historical discussion after the war. General Kopański covered the affair in his memoirs. Yet it remains a point of historical debate. General Kopański has come under considerable criticism for 'censoring' his superior's message.

However, once the decision was taken in Warsaw to begin the uprising to liberate the Polish capital, the efforts of all parties in London were directed at obtaining effective assistance from the allies in the form of air supplies and the sending of the Polish Airborne Brigade to Warsaw's assistance. Countless interventions over the subsequent two months resulted only in limited air supply drops to the Warsaw insurgents. Disregarding the practical operational difficulties which were serious, the western allies of Poland had simply ceded Poland to the Soviet sphere of interest as far back as November 1943 in Tehran.

The appointment of General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski as C-in-C, days before becoming a prisoner of war with the capitulation of Warsaw meant that he could not undertake his duties.¹⁷ In consequence the President of

¹⁷ Lieutenant-General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski (1895-1966) Polish soldier. During the First World War he served in the Austro-Hungarian Army as a cavalry platoon commander. From 1918 in the Polish Army, serving as deputy OC 9th Lancers Regiment. 1927-1938: deputy and then commander of the 9th Lancers Regiment. 1938-1939: Commandant of the Cavalry Training Centre. During the Polish 1939 Campaign he commanded an improvised cavalry brigade. Following the defeat he joined the resistance. 1940-1941: GOC Kraków District of the Union of Armed Struggle (renamed Home Army in February 1942). 1941-1943: Deputy Commandant-in-Chief of the Home Army and from 1943 to 1944 Commandant-in-Chief. Appointed C-in-C Polish Armed Forces in the last days of the Warsaw Rising. 1944-1945 German POW in Colditz. 1945-1946: C-in-C Armed Forces. After demobilisation he lived in London. 1955-1966: Member of the Council of Three.

Poland, Władysław Raczkiewicz, divided the duties of the C-in-C between himself, the Minister of National Defence (Lieutenant General Marian Kukiel) and the Chief of General Staff.¹⁸ Between October 1944 and February 1945 when General Anders was appointed acting C-in-C, General Kopański was responsible for the overall organisation and operational command of the Polish Armed Forces including the Home Army, now much weakened after the Warsaw Rising.

Two aims of Kopański's on which much effort was expended were the expansion of the land army and its concentration in one area to create a two-corps army on the western front. If he was partially successful in the former, the latter, mainly due to political reasons, was never achieved. In late 1944 the Polish Army was expanded so as to create third brigades for the divisions of the Polish 2nd Corps in Italy, the expansion of the 2nd Armoured Brigade into the 2nd Armoured Division and the creation of the 4th Infantry Division in the I Corps in Scotland. Kopański also re-organised the General Staff something he had been unable to do under General Sosnkowski who had rejected his proposals to streamline the General Staff's work and make it easier to carry out.

The end of the Second World War in Europe in May 1945 brought victory to the Allies. Whilst Poland could claim to be on the victorious side with its armed forces participating actively on various operational fronts from the first day of the war to the last, the country was a political loser. Eastern Poland with the consent of the western allies was annexed by the USSR and post-war Poland in its changed geographical borders handed over to Soviet

¹⁸ Władysław Raczkiewicz (1885-1947) Polish politician and lawyer. During the First World War he served in the Russian Army. 1917-1918: Chairman of the Supreme Polish Military Committee in Russia. Took part in the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-1920). 1921, 1925 and 1935-1936: Minister of Internal Affairs. 1930-1935: Speaker of the Senate (upper house of Parliament). 1926-1931: Governor of Wilno Province. 1936-1939: Governor of Pomorze Province. 1934-1939: Chairman of the World Federation of Poles Abroad. 1939-1947: President of the Republic of Poland (in Exile).

Lieutenant-General Marian Kukiel (1885-1973) Polish soldier and historian. During the First World War he served in the Polish Legions. During the Polish-Bolshevik War he commanded the 51st Infantry Regiment and the XXIVth Infantry Brigade. 1920-1923: Chief of the III (Operations) Bureau of the General Staff. 1923-1925: GOC 13th Infantry Division. 1925-1926: Head of the Military Historical Bureau. 1930 put on the retired list. 1930-1939: lecturer in history at the Jagiellonian University of Kraków and Curator of the Czartoryski Museum in Kraków. 1939-1940: Vice-Minister of Military Affairs in the Polish Government in Paris and London. 1940-1942: GOC Polish I Corps in Scotland. 1942-1949: Minister of Military Affairs/National Defence in successive Polish Governments in exile. 1955-1966: Chairman of the Executive Committee of the General Sikorski Historical Institute (from 1965 the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum). Author of many books including a biography of General Sikorski.

control and occupation, with a puppet communist government being installed in Warsaw under Soviet direction.

The fate of the free Polish Armed Forces spread out in Germany, Italy, Britain and the Middle East was now more than uncertain. The still legal and internationally recognised President of Poland and Polish Government in London were soon (5th July 1945) derecognised and the Soviet controlled regime in Warsaw recognised as the Provisional Government of Poland. Meanwhile the legal Polish Government in London remained recognised by a few countries. With the outcome of the war decided, the role of the Polish state authorities in exile remained clear: to continue to work and fight for Poland to regain her independence and sovereignty by whatever means that were necessary. In brief, over the next 45 years (1945-1990) the functions of the President of the Republic of Poland, the Polish Government, the Polish National Council and the post of C-in-C (Inspector General of the Armed Forces) were maintained in exile, with London being their base.

INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE POLISH RESETTLEMENT CORPS 1946-1949

In August 1945 the British Government made it clear they no longer recognised President Raczkiewicz as the head of the Polish Armed Forces nor Lt-Gen. Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski of Warsaw Rising fame as Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces. Basically, the British military authorities refused to deal with Polish military matters through him, but only through General Kopański as Chief of General Staff. The Polish Government in Exile drafted the necessary legal documents allowing Kopański to represent the Polish Armed Forces in dealing directly with the British War Office. He himself in accordance with his role kept the C-in-C informed and all decisions were made following meetings with him, the Polish Government and President Raczkiewicz, maintaining the constitutional role of the Chief of General Staff. The British Government and War Office under pressure from Moscow and Warsaw were pressing for the speediest demobilisation of the Polish forces in the West and if possible, the return of the demobbed soldiers to Poland. Hence the famous Ernest Bevin letter of March 1946 in which he hoped that the assurances of the Provisional Government in Warsaw were enough to encourage soldiers to return to Poland. However, those who felt they could not and decided to

remain would, as far as the British Government were able to ensure it, be treated with the respect due to them.

That summer and autumn the Polish 2 Corps in Italy was transported to Britain, with the Polish Forces in the Middle East arriving in 1947/1948. The demobilisation of the allied Polish Armed Forces had become a reality. To facilitate this, the British Parliament established the Polish Resettlement Corps as an instrument to carry out their demobilisation and induction into civilian life in a completely new and strange country. Whilst the obvious candidate for the Polish Inspector General of the PRC was General Anders as senior land commander Polish Forces, this was totally unacceptable to the British Government who saw him as being far too independent and politically involved. The choice fell on General Kopański who was appointed in September 1946, though the command of the PRC itself was held by a British general, Lt-Gen. Gwilyn Thomas.¹⁹ General Kopański was rightly or wrongly seen as being calmer and more understanding even reasonable though no less determined when it came to Poland's fundamental interests. The British Chief of the Imperial General Staff Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke wrote about Kopański in his diary following the revelation of the agreements at Yalta in February 1945: *Kopański adopting a wonderfully sober and quiet attitude on the Polish Question, [...] He said the Poles wished to go on fighting with us, but were not prepared to return to Poland until they knew that it was entirely free and not a vassal of Russia in any shape or form.*²⁰

Over the next three years the Polish Armed Forces were reduced to skeleton units until finally all soldiers were demobbed. More than half of the soldiers decided to remain in the West, the majority in the UK. General Kopański remained as Inspector General of the Polish Resettlement Corps until the autumn of 1949 when finally, he too hung up his uniform and entered civvy street. General Kopański along with 75 other senior Polish officers were 'stripped' off their Polish citizenship by the Warsaw Provisional Government

¹⁹ Lieutenant-General Sir Gwilyn Ivor Thomas (1893-1972) British soldier. During the First World War he served in the artillery on the western front. Twice wounded. 1924-1925: attended the Staff College, Camberley. 1935-1936: Brigade Major to the 1st Divisional Artillery. 1939-1940: Deputy Director of Recruiting and Organization, War Office. 1940-1942 Commandant Royal Artillery 2nd Infantry Division and I Corps. 1942-1945: GOC 43d (Wessex) Infantry Division in the NW Europe Campaign. 1945-1947: GOC I Corps District of the British Army of the Rhine. 1947-1948: Administrator Polish Forces under British operational command (Polish Resettlement Corps). 1948-1950: GOC-in-C Anti-Aircraft Command. 1950-1952: Quartermaster General to the Forces.

²⁰ Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, *War Diaries 1939-1945*, ed. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, London 2001, p.664.

in September 1946 for having joined the PRC. It was an attempt by the Warsaw regime to make the joining of the PRC a crime which had consequences. The fact that the Warsaw regime had no legal authority to strip Polish nationals of their citizenship was neither here nor there.

CHIEF OF THE POLISH GENERAL STAFF IN EXILE 1947-1970

In 1947, whilst still Inspector General of the Polish Resettlement Corps and simultaneously retaining his position as Chief of General Staff, Kopański set up what was called the Nucleus General Staff. This was one of the least known of his activities, rarely written about or even mentioned in publications.

Before expanding on the topic a few words about the organisation of the Polish state authorities in exile after the Second World War are needed. The office of the President of the Republic of Poland, the Polish Government and the Polish National Council (mini parliament in exile) continued to be based in London up until 1990 when the last President of Poland in Exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski²¹ transferred the symbols of the prewar independent II Republic to the newly freely elected Lech Wałęsa.²² The Government in exile disbanded and the National Council wound up its activities in 1992. Between 1945 and 1990 the legal Polish state authorities had remained active in exile on the basis of the April 1935 Constitution which allowed the President to nominate his successor in wartime. Since no Peace Treaty had been signed after the Second World War this clause remained in force. Apart from the three main civilian offices of state, two main military ones were also

²¹ Ryszard Kaczorowski (1919-2010) Polish politician. 1939-1940: active in the Polish resistance movement in Soviet occupied Białystok. In 1940 arrested and deported to the USSR. From 1942 he served in the Polish Armed Forces as an NCO, taking part in the Italian Campaign with the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division of the Polish 2nd Corps. After the war he settled in Britain working as a bookkeeper. Active in Polish life in exile. 1955-1967: Chief Scout and President of the Polish Scout Movement (in Exile). Member of the Polish National Council (mini parliament in exile). 1986-1989: Minister of Home Affairs in the Government in Exile. 1989-1990: the last President of the Republic of Poland in exile. Killed in the air crash of the Polish presidential plane at Smolensk on route for the 65th anniversary commemoration of the Katyn Massacre.

²² Lech Wałęsa (1943) Polish trade unionist, opposition politician. Worked as an electrician in the Gdańsk Shipyard. During the 1970s prominent in opposition to the communist state authorities. In 1980 co-organiser and first president of the Solidarity Trade Union movement. Instrumental in the August 1980 agreement allowing the union to exist and function. Following the imposition of martial law in 1981 arrested and interned, released in 1982. Continued to lead Solidarity throughout the 1980s leading to the fall of communism and Soviet control in Poland. 1990-1995: the first universally elected President of the Republic of Poland. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983.

maintained: that of the Inspector General of the Armed Forces (designate Commander-in-Chief in the event of war) and that of the Chief of General Staff. The former post remained from November 1946 with General Władysław Anders up until his death on 12th May 1970, while the latter was held by General Stanisław Kopański.

As it is important for understanding events later in Kopański's story, mention must also be made of the split in the Polish state authorities in exile lasting from 1954 to 1972. Without going into excessive detail, during those years there was a duality in these authorities. On the one hand there was the then President of the Republic of Poland, August Zaleski, and the Polish Government (Prime Minister and ministers).²³ Following the rupture President Zaleski nominated a new Inspector General of the Armed Forces and Chief of General Staff. On the other hand, there was the Executive of National Unity. The function of head of state was encompassed by the Council of Three which appointed the Executive of National Unity (Government) and which also had a mini parliament in the form of the Council of National Unity. It was not until the death of President Zaleski that the two camps unified under President Stanisław Ostrowski who had been nominated by Zaleski as his successor. The Executive of National Unity also maintained the above mentioned two military posts. One of the members of the Council of Three was General Anders who was dismissed from his post of Inspector General of the Armed Forces by President Zaleski in 1954, but confirmed in that post by the Executive of National Unity.

Back to 1947 and the setting up of the Nucleus General Staff. For Poland the struggle to regain independence continued after the war. At the time it was envisaged by many that a new conflict between the USSR and the free world would ensue in the next several years with the USSR aiming for European domination and control. In the event of such a conflict the Polish exiled authorities envisaged the remobilisation of the Polish Armed Forces in the West which would then take part in the conflict with the aim of liberating

²³ August Zaleski (1883-1972) Polish diplomat and politician. 1911 graduate of the London School of Economics (B.Sc. hons). From 1918 in the diplomatic service. 1919-1921: Foreign Ministry in Warsaw as head of the Great Powers Department. 1922-1926: Polish minister in Rome. 1926-1932: Foreign Minister. 1928-1935; Senator (in the upper house of Parliament). 1932-1939: Chairman of the Trade Bank (Bank Handlowy) in Warsaw. 1939-1941; minister of Foreign Affairs in the Polish Government in Paris and London. 1941-1947: Head of the Civil Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland. 1947-1972: President of the Republic of Poland (in Exile). His refusal to abide by the Act of Unity of 1954 led to the split and a duality in the Polish state authorities in exile until 1972.

Poland. To this purpose a few senior staff officers under Colonel (later Major-General) Henryk Piątkowski were handpicked by General Kopański to form the Nucleus General Staff.²⁴ Their duties were to prepare for the mobilisation of Polish wartime soldiers living in the free world and form army, naval and air force units. Organisation, ordre de bataille and mobilisation tables were drawn up as were countless plans for their use as part of an allied force under US patronage. The various exigencies were altered annually as circumstances demanded.

The Nucleus General Staff had its representatives in a number of countries where Poles had settled after being demobilised. An important role of the various army veteran organisations was to maintain and build morale amongst their members so that when the call came, they would flock to form the Free Polish Army. General Kopański was active in promoting the work of the veterans, several times visiting the USA and France where many members of the Polish Armed Forces had settled. With his good connections with the French military establishment, he was instrumental in securing French agreement to train Polish soldiers of the “Pogoń” Brigade Officers School amongst others in parachute jumps. Volunteers travelled to France in groups to undertake these courses with the French Army.

During this period General Kopański wrote several papers and reports for the US and western allied military concerning the military situation of People’s Poland and its army. Amongst these were reports on “How the Soviet Union subordinated to itself the Armed Forces in Poland and seized power over them” (1954) and “The defence of Western Europe in the light of existing international agreements” (1953, in Polish). The Nucleus General Staff was active until the mid-1960s under the guise of the Polish Historical Institute set up in 1948 in Ealing (19 Woodville Gardens); although it would be more accurate to date its decline to the mid to late 1950s following the end of the Korean War and reduced US funding.

²⁴ Major-General Henryk Piątkowski (1902-1969) Polish soldier and military historian. A member of the clandestine Polish Military Organisation in 1917/1918. 1918: Defence of Lwów. 1920-1927: graduate and instructor in the Infantry Officers School. 1927-1930; platoon and company commander, 1st Rifle Battalion. 1930-1932; Staff Academy in Warsaw. 1932-1935: staff officer 1st and 7th Infantry Divisions. 1936-1939: Special Duties Officer to the Chief of General Staff. After the Polish 1939 Campaign in the Near East with the Independent Carpathian Brigade Reserve Depot and HQ Polish Forces in the Middle East. 1943-1944: Chief of Staff 3rd Carpathian Rifles Division during the Italian Campaign. 1944; Officer Commanding 5th Wileńska Infantry Brigade during the Gothic Line Campaign. 1944-1946: 1st Deputy Chief of General Staff. From 1947-1960: Chief of the Nucleus General Staff under the guise of the Polish Historical Institute in Ealing. Author of studies of the Polish 1939 Campaign and of the Battle of Monte Cassino.

INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE ARMED FORCES IN EXILE AND MILITARY MORAL AUTHORITY

The day after General Anders died on 12th May 1970, General Kopański was appointed Inspector General of the Armed Forces and later that year also made a member of the Council of Three. He held the former post until 19th March 1976 when he resigned due to increasing ill health, while the latter post was wound up in April 1972 on the death of President Zaleski and the unification of the dual state authorities. The new President, Stanisław Ostrowski, confirmed Kopański in the post of Inspector General.²⁵ He continued a vigorous and wide ranging correspondence with varying veteran circles, in all of which the overriding message was to continue all activities in the direction of preserving the historical truth of the role of the Polish Armed Forces during the Second World War and the necessity of pressing to achieve a reversal of the Teheran and Yalta decisions and regain Polish independence and sovereignty.

Especially close to General Kopański's heart were the Association of the Veterans of the Carpathian Rifle Brigade, popularly known as the Rats of Tobruk and the Association of Former Soldiers of the Carpathian Division. He regularly attended their various reunions and annual meetings. He was a member of many Polish associations and organisations including the Polish Cultural Foundation (which published a daily newspaper in Polish in UK) and the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum which was particularly important to him. From 1956 until his death, he was Chairman of the Horse Artillery Veterans Association.

He wrote two volumes of memoirs, the first covering his childhood, youth, service in the Russian Tsarist Army and the Polish I Corps, and service in the Army of independent Poland (*Moja służba w Wojsku Polskim 1917-1939 – My service in the Polish Army 1917-1939*) which was published in London in 1965. The second volume, published earlier covered the years of the Second

²⁵ Stanisław Ostrowski (1892-1982) Polish medical doctor and politician. He served in the Polish Army as a medical doctor 1918-1922. Following the end of the Polish-Bolshevik War he practiced medicine and was an Assistant Professor of Dermatology at the Jan Kazimierz University of Lwów. 1930-1939: member of the Polish Sejm (Lower House of Parliament). 1936-1939: Mayor of Lwów. Arrested and imprisoned by the Soviets. 1941-1946 served as a medical officer in the Polish Army in the USSR, Middle East and 2nd Corps in the Italian Campaign. After the war in exile, member of several Polish organisations. 1972-1979: President of the Republic of Poland in Exile.

World War (*Wspomnienia Wojenne 1939-1946 – War Memoirs 1939-1946*) and also published in London in 1961. This volume in particular should be translated into English. Written with clarity and self-effacement it is a mine of information not only about Polish military history of the war but French and British relations with the Poles in varying situations thrown up by the conflict.

Kopański was married in 1925 to Janina de Rethel with whom he had two children, a daughter Anna-Maria born in 1927 and a son Tadeusz born in 1932 who became a professional British Army soldier in the Royal Horse Artillery, retiring with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

General Stanisław Kopański died on 23rd March 1976. His funeral on 2nd April at the Polish Church of St. Andrew Bobola became a patriotic manifestation. He was laid to rest in Northwood Cemetery. In 2023 his remains were exhumed and buried in Warsaw's Powązki Military Cemetery. On 23rd April 1976 a memorial mass at Westminster Cathedral took place which saw hundreds of his ex-soldiers and colleagues from his army days and political exile gather for the occasion. The front pews reserved for allied representatives were ghostly in their emptiness, leading Louis Fitzgibbon to send a letter to the editor of the Polish daily newspaper in which he wrote, *It was with great shame that I observed how very few of my countrymen attended the Requiem Mass for the late General Stanisław Kopański. [...] Meantime please forgive us – we seem somehow to have lost our sense of gratitude and forgotten our manners. I am so sorry.*²⁶

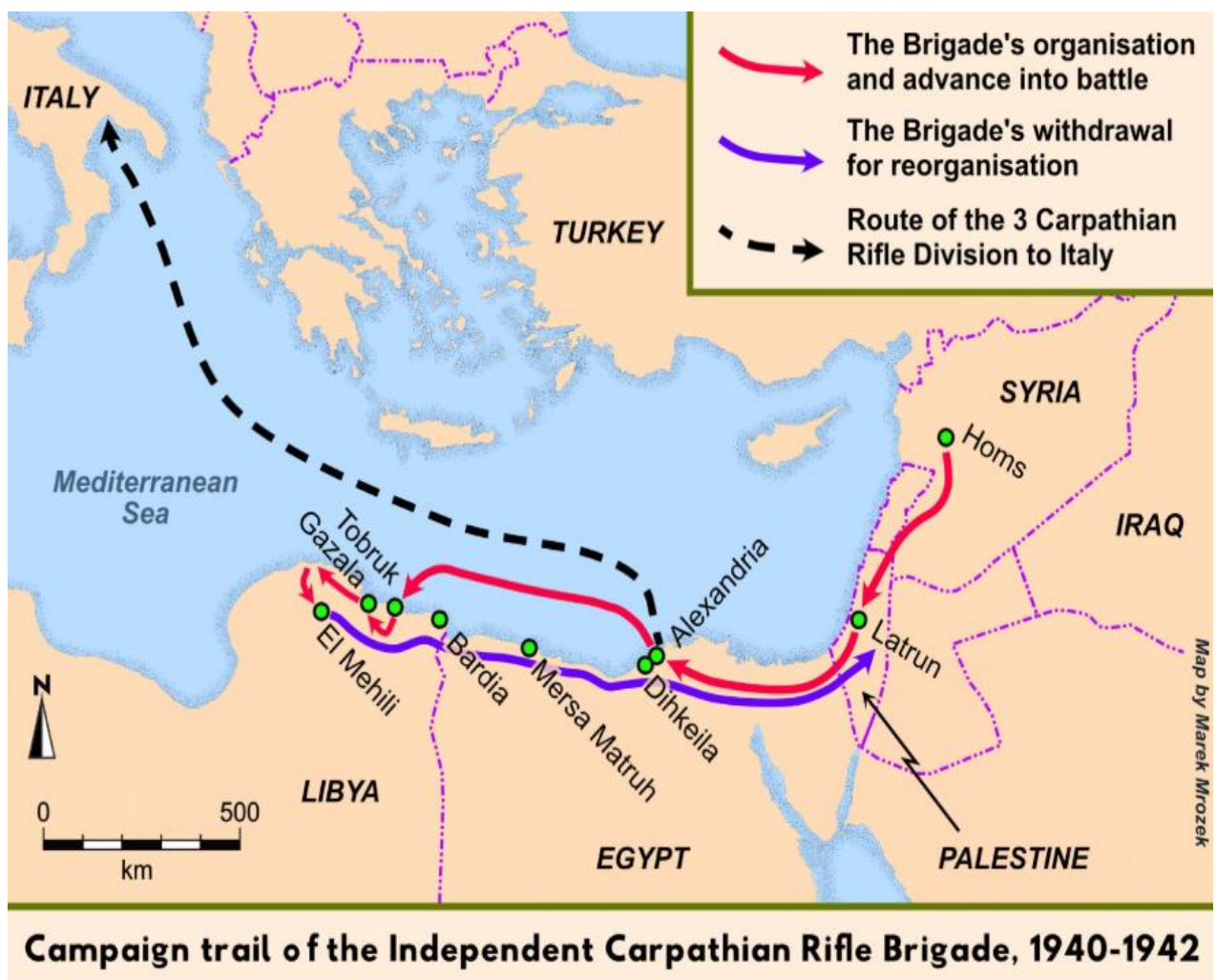
Among the many tributes which were sent, I have picked two which seem to encapsulate Kopański as a military man and as a person. Count Edward Raczyński²⁷ one-time Polish ambassador in London and a member of the Council of Three, wrote that he held General Kopański *in the highest esteem as the best example of a Polish “gentleman”, a person without flaw, an*

²⁶ Louis Fitzgibbon (1925-2003) British naval officer, businessman and writer. 1938-1954: served in the Royal Navy. 1968-1972: General Secretary of the British Council for Aid to Refugees. Author of several books about the Katyn Massacre (the murder of Polish officers by the Soviet NKVD in 1940) including *Katyn. A Crime without Parallel* (1971) and *The Katyn Cover Up* (1972). He was the initiator and Honorary Secretary of the Katyn Memorial Fund. He later championed the Somali cause and wrote *The Betrayal of the Somalis* (1982).

²⁷ Count Edward Raczyński (1891-1993) Polish diplomat. 1919-1922: Secretary, Polish Legation in Copenhagen. 1922-1926: Secretary, Legation in London. 1932-1934: Envoy to the League of Nations in Geneva. 1934-1945: Ambassador in London. 1941-1943; Minister of Foreign Affairs. 1947-1952: Chief Polish Advisor to the British Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. 1954-1972: Member of the Council of Three. 1979-1986: President of the Republic of Poland in Exile. Author of *In Allied London* (1962).

adornment of his profession and his nation. Another who had known him well wrote of him as the “*niciest of generals*”.

He lived his life to the full, and it can truly be said of him that from boyhood until death he lived his whole life in the service of his country.





Major Stanisław Kopański c. 1920s



Lt.Col Stanisław Kopański c. 1930s



Gen. Stanisław Kopański as GOC
Carpathian Brigade 1941



Gen. Stanisław Kopański as GOC
3rd Carpathian Rifle Division 1942/1943



As Chief of General Staff 1944



As Inspector General of the
Armed Forces



Gen. Kopański with General Władysław Anders (left) and Maj. Marian Czarnecki in
Paris, France c. 1960

Lieutenant-General Stanisław
Kopański's decorations



Lieutenant-General Stanisław Kopański's
selected Polish and foreign decorations

Lieutenant-General Stanisław Kopański's decorations

Polish:

Gold Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari (1942)

Silver Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari (1920)

Grand Sash of the Order of the Rebirth of Poland (1976)

Officer's Cross of the Order of the Rebirth of Poland (before 1939)

Cross of Valour and bar (1920)

Cross of Valour (1942)

Gold Cross of Merit with Swords

Gold Cross of Merit

Medal of Independence

Army Medal and two bars (1946)

War Medal 1918-1921 (1928)

10th Anniversary of Independence Medal (1928)

Silver Medal for Long Service (1938)

Bronze Medal for Long Service (1938)

British:

Companion of the Order of the Bath (1946)

Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1942)

Distinguished Service Order (1941)

1939-1945 Star (1946)

Africa Star (1946)

Italy Star (1946)

France and Germany Star (1946)

Defence Medal (1946)

Czechoslovak:

Cross of Valour

French:

Order of the Legion of Honour (IV class)

Croix de Guerre avec Palme

Commander of the Ordre de l'Étoile Noir

Médaille Interalliée

Latvian:

War Medal

Knights of Malta: Knight of Magistral Grace of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (1974)



Memorial plaque at St Andrew Bobola Polish Garison Church in Hammersmith, London

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ABBREVIATIONS

B.Sc (hons) - Bachelor of Science (honours)

C-in-C - Commander-in-Chief

CGS - Chief of the General Staff

Col. - Colonel

ed. - editor/edited

Gen. - General

GHQ - General Headquarters

GOC - General Officer Commanding

HQ - Headquarters

Lt. - Lieutenant

Lt-Col. - Lieutenant-Colonel

Lt-Gen. - Lieutenant-General

NCO - Non-Commissioned Officer

NKVD - Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs)

NW - North-West

OC - Officer commanding

POW - Prisoner of War

PRC - Polish Resettlement Corps

UK - United Kingdom

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



The Polish Prime Minister and Polish Commander-in-Chief, General Władysław Sikorski, arrived in Africa on 14 November 1941 and visited units of Carpathian Brigade on its front lines.



Stained glass window commemorating Gen. Stanisław Kopański and the soldiers of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade in St. Andrew Boboola's Church, London (1978). Design: Aleksander Klecki

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